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Japan

Agricultural Situation

This Week in Japan

2001

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Report Highlights: New American *Bento* Lunchbox Enjoys Brisk Sales Despite Farmer Opposition; Safeguards on Wood Products Unlikely; U.S. Tomato Sales Expected to Improve Over Last Year; Secondary Housing New Policy Priority.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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This Week in Japan

An Update of Major News and Events from the Largest U.S. Agricultural Export Market

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i New American Bento Lunchbox Enjoys Brisk Sales Despite Farmer Opposition: The American-made *O-Bento* being sold by Nippon Restaurant Enterprise (NRE) debuted on July 17 with substantial media attention. Newspaper and television reports were highly laudatory regarding the high quality and reasonable price for this organic lunchbox. Japan Agriculture (JA) protestors were predictably out with anti-imported rice flyers and offering free packs of cooked domestic rice emblazoned with the phrase: "Well, after all, shouldn't *bentos* be made with Japanese rice!" Nonetheless, train-traveling consumers seem to find the new concept appealing and sales look promising. NRE reported that sales of the new *O-Bento* are already 2.5 times their current best selling *bento*. (ATO/Tokyo)

i Safeguards on Wood Products Unlikely: Though Japan has not ruled out safeguard actions on wood products, local media are reporting that implementation would be difficult. Laminated lumber and plywood remain on MAFF's watch-list of products. Safeguard actions (e.g. higher tariffs) would hurt a significant portion of Japan's wood products industry that relies on imported wood for about 80 percent of its fiber needs. One editorial concludes that Japan's wood products industry should not be distracted by safeguards at the expense of needed structural reforms within the domestic industry. (AgAffairs Tokyo)

i U.S. Tomato Sales Expected to Improve Over Last Year: U.S. tomatoes experienced slow sales during the 2000/01 winter season, but moderate import growth of U.S. tomatoes is expected in 2001. Japan's pizza chains are promoting sales with fresh U.S. Roma tomatoes and U.S. round tomatoes are also finding new customers. South Korea continues to expand shipments of fresh tomatoes to Japan. (AgAffairs Tokyo)

i Secondary Housing New Policy Priority: Faced with a stagnant economy, continued depreciation of property values, and oversupply of unsold homes, Japan's housing starts in 2001 are forecast to decline 5% from last year. In response, a top Japanese housing official reports that new policy measures will focus on improving the stock of existing houses and promotion of the secondary housing market, rather than increasing the construction of new houses. See FAS/Japan's latest reports, JA1057 through JA1065, for information on Japan's wood products market. (AgAffairs Tokyo)

i Upcoming Events: August 30 Toho Food Service Fair 2001 in Kobe (Western Japan); September 5 Toho Food Service Fair 2001 in Fukuoka (Western Japan); CGC Food Products Annual Exhibition in Yokohama (near Tokyo); September 26-28 Health Ingredients Japan in Tokyo.